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Melissa's Baby

Gladys Freeman

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Mis' Melissa's Baby

By GLADYS FREEMAN

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"Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

—*The Bible.*

To those who by Faith have realized their Vision, this little book is lovingly dedicated.

Mis' Melissa's Baby

UP among the hills of Northern Westchester, in a secluded little spot beneath the shadow of Iron Mountain, lived Mis' Melissa Perkins.

Many long lonesome years she had spent in the little old house, gray and weather-beaten, with its garden of tangled rose-bushes and straggling rows of hollyhocks and dahlias that in late summer flaunted their gay colors inside the picket fence beside the grassy road.

Secluded, did I say?—but in winter only, when the snow lay deep and white, like a carpet of cotton, and the trees sparkled with their icy coating. Then, indeed, it was a rare sight to see a stranger pass, but in summer, when everything was green and beautiful as a garden of Paradise, the city folks came in throngs. They swarmed over the hills then, and walked and sang

along the winding country roads or sat at ease upon the scarred and initialed seats beneath the maple trees.

Happy and jolly folks they were, too, for the most part, seemingly carefree and well satisfied with the world in general. They called themselves "New Thoughters" and in the "Hall" which they had built upon the hill they gathered every day to dance and sing, to listen to good music and talks on various things.

Some of them, indeed, not knowing that Mis' Melissa had a deep-seated antipathy towards them, had even wanted to come and board with her in the quaint little house, or be permitted to pitch their tents in the old orchard or beside the Tumbling Brook that wound its rippling, rushing way through her meadow, but to all these Mis' Melissa gave the same emphatic answer, "No."

Often these "folks," as Mis' Melissa called them, came in groups at eventide to watch the glorious colors of the sunset glow and fade in the Western sky, and it

was this particular thing that at last aroused Mis' Melissa's ire to the highest pitch and brought about my story.

"I DECLARE, I won't stand fer it any longer," she grumbled to her nearest neighbor, Mrs. Pettit, who had chanced to run in that afternoon, "this here traipsing across my best pasture lot every evenin' an' scarin' that young calf almost to death with their outlandish clothes and heathenish ways has got ter stop or I'll hev the law on 'em.

"What with that strange critter in the yeller gown with her head tied up in a bandage that calls herself a Swani or a Swarmi, or suthin' that sounds like a bird or a hive of bees, and that little feller with the black eyes that tells you about your 'rorer,' whatever under the sun that may be, I don't know what the world's a-comin' to.

"When folks give up their fine comfortable apartments in the city and come here ter live on milk and sardines in a little tent no bigger'n thet chicken coop—then I want ter know—there must be sumthin' wrong with 'em somewheres.

"Only t'other day, when I was a-comin'

home from the village, I met a hull bunch of 'em on the Woods Road near old Cy Miller's place, a-comin' along a hoppin' and skippin' like mad, fer all the world like a lot of children jest out o' school. I never did see sech goin's on fer grown folks in my life.

"They do say they have the queerest notions," she went on, confidentially. "They git up at four o'clock in the mornin' ter see the sun-rise and fine evenin's they git up picnics to go out and see the moon come up behind the hills. Jenny Appleby's daughter went along with some of the young folks one night and she said the way they went on was somethin' scandalous! They made a bonfire and roasted corn in the ashes—spilin' good green corn I call it, and they cut sticks and put them marshmaller things on 'em and stuck 'em in the fire until they was all oozy and black and then they called 'em *delicious*.

"But, would you believe it, Mis' Pettit, after they got through with all them tom fool notions they all set 'round and sang

and recited and some of 'em stood up and waved their hands and kept a-bowin' and singin' ter the fire like they was crazy. Called it fire worshipin' they did—but I call it jest plain heathenish doin's.

"I'm a-goin' down ter that there 'Hall' to-morrer and tell 'em jest what I think of 'em. I've hed enough of their foolishness and I don't purpose ter hev enny more."

TRUE to her word, the next afternoon Mis' Melissa dressed herself with great care and neatness, and solemnly, and with sour visage she set forth to the camp of the Philistines.

The way to the "Hall," that stronghold of the enemy which she planned to invade and to soundly berate those in charge, lay down a sun-flecked dusty road winding like a silver ribbon beneath the trees. High on the side, great jagged rocks covered with lichens towered above her, and over the gray stone walls, laid by hands long gone to rest, the wild ivy climbed in riotous profusion and wild flowers nodded as she passed, but Mis' Melissa strode on with eyes blind to all the beauty that lay about her.

As she neared the Hall, whose doors stood invitingly open, Mis' Melissa stopped, arrested by the sound of some one singing within. She had never heard anything like it before and it thrilled her as she listened. A wonderfully beautiful voice it was that rose clear and strong and

floating out over the heads of the listeners it went right to Mis' Melissa as she stood almost spellbound and entered straight into her heart.

She stood a moment, irresolute, not knowing whether to enter or not, the melody of the song still ringing in her ears, when a pleasant, smiling woman came forward and quietly offered her a seat near the door. Mis' Melissa sank down in it and listened breathlessly. The singer's voice still rose and fell in low sweet cadences of music: "Somewhere, somewhere, beautiful Isle of Somewhere," rang out clear as a bell and with a final crashing chord on the piano she stopped and smilingly faced her audience.

The singer was a young girl with a bright, pretty face and she seemed to look right at Mis' Melissa as she smiled and Mis' Melissa smiled back in return. She was in tune already with the harmonious vibrations of the Hall and its audience.

SLOWLY the speaker for the day ascended the platform and took her place before the little rustic reading stand. She, too, was young or seemed to be and looked scarcely older than the singer who had preceded her. Delicate and fair, with a smiling mouth and eyes that seemed to bid one take courage however dark the way, she radiated strength of purpose and power of will as she gazed in silence upon the audience that sat before her.

"Friends," she announced in a clear, sweet voice, "the subject of my talk today is "Visualization." We are told in the Bible that 'All that the Father hath is ours and that if we ask we shall receive.' There is nothing that our hearts can desire that is not already ours if we set about it in the right way. To begin with, we must have Faith—that is the first essential, and without it we can do nothing. Hand in hand with Faith, we must have Hope, and with these two, clearing all doubt aside we can and will attain our heart's desire.

"Are you cherishing some beautiful vision, some lofty ideal in your heart? Would you be a great singer, an artist or a poet? You can realize your dream, for to desire is to obtain. All achievement begins in thought. We must first create in the invisible before we can manifest in the visible. The oak sleeps in the acorn, the birdling in the egg, and your dreams of great things to be are the seeds of realities. Desire is the promise of its own fulfilment. 'Ask and ye shall receive'—such is the law!

"To come down to more mundane affairs—would you be happy and prosperous in your daily life? Would you be healthy, wealthy and wise? Do you desire your own automobile—your own home and to live in a beautiful environment free from all care and anxiety—surrounded by those you love?

"Are you lonely and unhappy? You need not be—you can have love and companionship in your life if you will—it is for you to say. Begin now—expect, de-

mand and claim your share of the All-Good. Cherish your vision—hold fast to it in the face of all seeming disappointment and failure. Shed the light of an unfaltering faith upon it and as surely as night follows day your desire will be realized."

MIS' MELISSA listened with deep interest. What was this strange doctrine they were preaching? It was all so new and wonderful she could not grasp it. Was it possible that we could have anything our hearts desired if only we knew how to ask God aright? What a wonderful thing if only it were true!

The speaker talked on, but Mis' Melissa had lost the thread of her discourse—she could not follow it. It was too complex; but one thing she knew—the Bible had said so—it must be true!

The speaker finished and left the platform to mingle with the rising throng and to exchange a smile or word of greeting with each.

Mis' Melissa stood alone. She felt an alien and a stranger in that happy, smiling crowd.

Gradually they were passing out, but still she waited, for a wonderful thing had happened. A great light had shone for just a moment across the narrow pathway of Mis' Melissa's life and she felt a wild

tumultuous longing within her heart to know and understand something of what the lecturer had said.

Was this thing possible? Was it really true? Could we have anything we wished for if only we asked aright? Surely it must be true—the Bible said so, but how—how must we ask for it?

All her life she had prayed for just one thing, but that prayer had not been granted and she had ceased to pray for it in late years. It was no use. God had not granted the boon and now it was too late! But if prayer is "the soul's sincere desire, unuttered or expressed" deep down in her heart Mis' Melissa had never ceased praying and constantly, her unuttered thought was reaching out into unseen realms, craving the thing she had been denied.

What was this new way to ask of God? Was there some magic formula—some heathenish rite to perform ere the prayer was granted? She would ask—she *must* know, and stepping forward she followed the speaker of the afternoon outside and

summoning up her courage timidly touched her upon the arm.

The speaker turned, and recognizing Mis' Melissa smiled and extended her hand. Quickly, Mis' Melissa put the question to her, looking almost as if she feared the answer, and anxiously awaited the reply.

"Certainly, I shall be glad to help you," said the lady with the smiling mouth and clear eyes. "Suppose we walk up the road together and you can tell me of your desires or what it is you wish for the most in all the world."

For a moment Mis' Melissa hesitated, but after a quick glance at the serene and lovely face beside her, she said softly, "If you won't think me a foolish old woman, I'll tell ye.

"I—I want a baby—all to myself—a soft little teeny thing that I kin love and cuddle all I've a mind to. Somethin' t' watch over and care fer and see it grow and teach it to walk and talk."

The lady looked surprised for just a

moment, then smiled sweetly—even a little sadly—but she answered, "What a lovely wish! Surely we can bring that about somehow."

THUS encouraged, Mis' Melissa spoke freely to her new found friend. "Ye see," she said, "I've lived alone in the little house up there at the bend of the road ever since father died, except fer the hired man that comes in every day ter do the chores. I had a baby sister onct—such a wee mite of a thing, she wuz, and Mother died when she wuz born and the baby only lived a few months, but I haint never forgotten her and her cute baby ways. I can see her little face as ef 'twas only yestiddy and yet it's nigh on ter thirty years sence she died. I kin see her lookin' about with her big blue eyes as ef she was a-wonderin' where she wuz, and the little hands—they wuz just like the faded rose leaves that drop off in summer time—all pink and crumpled up like. Somehow, I've never forgotten her and I've always wanted sumthin' ter love. It's terrible lonely sence Father died and I git ter thinkin' and sometimes life don't seem worth the livin'. There ain't nothin' ter live for.

"I've always been a prayin' woman and I drive over ter Boscobel right often t' Sunday mornin' service, and there ain't a night passes but what I say my prayers, but mebbe I don't ask the Lord aright and that's why my prayers ain't never answered."

"Prayer is never in vain when Faith is in our hearts," said the lady softly.

"Wal, I dunno," answered Mis' Melissa. "There must be sumthin' wrong or the Lord would a-heerd me long ago. Do you suppose," she went on wistfully, "ef I learned to ask the right way He'd give me that baby my heart's bin a-cryin' out fer so long?"

"I'm sure He would," said the lady earnestly. Her face was very grave now and she spoke slowly. It was plain Mis' Melissa's words had touched her deeply.

"Well, ef you could teach me how t' ask so's the Lord would hear me, I certainly would be obliged and I'll be glad ter pay fer it, too, fer I ain't one to ask nothin' from no one."

"If I can help you to attain your wish I shall be amply repaid. The reward is in the doing and I am glad to be of service," the lady answered. "You remember that in the Bible it says 'All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer believing ye shall receive'?"

Mis' Melissa nodded.

"Then to-night," the lady went on, "when you pray—pray believing. Ask God to bring it about so that you may have some little one on whom to bestow your love. Tell Him that somewhere in this great Universe there is a little Soul that needs your loving care and trust to God to bring it about. You must not say how or when it is to come—leave it all to Him.

"FIRST you must understand that the Invisible realm is governed by spiritual and mental laws which are just as fixed and immutable as any in the material world. Do not forget this; just as surely as one and one make two, so sure it is that when we make the demand we start the supply toward us just as the pendulum of a clock when started will swing back an equal distance if free.

"Remember that the desire or wish for any good thing is God's promise that it is already ours in the great realm of Supply and Demand.

"This little one is already yours in the Invisible or you would not desire it.

"The Bible says, too, 'Ask and ye shall receive.' Tell God what you wish and then thank Him that it is already yours. True prayer is thanksgiving and when we have come into that realization of Faith where we know that when we ask, we have already received and can give thanks accordingly, then have we indeed entered into the joy of the Lord.

"Have faith above all things, Miss Melissa, for Faith takes right hold of the thing desired and brings it forth into visibility.

" 'Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of Heaven and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it.' "

All this time Mis' Melissa had listened attentively, but she said nothing. She was trying hard to understand it all—it was so strange—so new—her poor brain could not grasp it. Indeed many of the words she had never even heard of, and it all seemed too wonderful to be really true. The quotations from the Bible she knew—she had often read them in the long winter evenings as she sat alone and these gave her confidence. Yes, she would try!

THEY had now reached the turn in the road and Mis' Melissa's little home, gray and worn like its owner, lay before them bathed in the golden light of the setting sun.

"Thank you Mis'——"

"Stanton," said the lady smiling.

"I surely am glad I spoke ter you about it, and I'm a-goin' to try hard," said Mis' Melissa, gratefully clasping the hand extended to her. "I'll begin this very night. 'Taint easy ter git these new fangled notions about prayer and religion in yer head all ter onct, but I'm a-goin' ter do my best."

"To-morrow, if you will let me, I will come and bring some books that will help you to understand more clearly these great truths," Mrs. Stanton answered; "but do not expect that your wish, like Jack in the Bean Stalk, will spring up into realization in a single night.

"You must first plant the seed of thought and cultivate it carefully with Faith, Hope and Love and in time it will burst its covering and push its way into light and visi-

bility. Be patient, and do not expect it to blossom ere it has time to bud.

"Remember, we can not change years of wrong thinking into the flowers and fruits of realization in a day. We must start right, and then by patient, persistent effort, never faltering, never wearying, we shall at last attain our heart's desire.

"Our beloved poet, Mrs. Wilcox, says:

" 'Whatever you want, if you wish for it long,
With constant yearning and ceaseless desire;
If your wish soars upward on wings so strong
That they never grow languid, never tire,
Why, over the storm clouds and out of the dark
It will come flying some day to you,
As the dove with the olive branch flew to the ark,
And the wish you've been dreaming, it will come true.' "

Reaching out, she again grasped the

wrinkled, toilworn hand of Mis' Melissa in her own soft white one and held it for a moment.

"Until to-morrow," she said gently, and turning, retraced her steps down the quiet road.

MIS' MELISSA stood and gazed at the retreating figure, a new light in her eyes—a new interest in her face.

The last rays of the setting sun still shed its light over all the landscape and the Western sky was aflame with beauty. Far in the distance the towering crags of Storm King and the Dunderberg, wrapped in the purple haze of nightfall, were silhouetted against the crimson sky.

Mis' Melissa looked up and the spell of the dying day's beauty fell upon her.

"Seems t' me the sky wuz never so beautiful," she said aloud. "Ef 'twuz, I haint noticed it afore; must be some magic in them New Thought folks," she continued. "Seems as ef I'd been a wearin' a pair o' them blue glasses and they'd suddenly fell off and everythin' on the face o' Nature wuz changed.

"When that girl's voice came out ter meet me, so clear and sweet this afternoon, it seemed t' strike me plum in the heart and made me feel as ef there was a little

bird there a-flutterin' and a-beatin' its wings t' break out ter be free," and turning, with a smile, she entered the little house.

Later, as she set out the rows of shining pans and strained the milk, unconsciously she hummed a little tune. Jim, the hired man, her only helper on the place, looked at her in astonishment when he heard it, for Mis' Melissa was noted more for her sharp tongue and crabbed ways than for her singing powers.

That evening, when all was still except for the shrill call of insects and the night wind in the trees, Mis' Melissa sat alone and thought long and deeply of the afternoon and all that she had heard, and later, when she knelt to pray she tried her best to put her new-found ideas into practice.

"Lord," she prayed, "I don't know much about this new fangled way o' prayin'—I never wuz much fer takin' up new things and certainly I ain't had much use fer them New Thoughters; but, Lord, ef their way is right—ef I've been askin' wrong all these years—then show me the way. Thou hast

said, 'Ask and ye shall receive.' Lord, I abide in Thy promise. Amen," and she fell asleep serene and happy in the new consciousness of life that had come to her.

THE next morning Mis' Melissa smiled as she went about her work, and eagerly awaited her visitor's coming.

Promptly at four o'clock she saw the flutter of Mrs. Stanton's white gown as she passed through the little gate and walked up the path, pausing, now and then, to inhale the fragrance of the cinnamon pinks that grew in wild profusion beside it. Mis' Melissa sought to usher her into the little parlor, dark and unused for so long, but Mrs. Stanton graciously declined.

"Let us talk out here beneath the trees," she said smilingly. "When we look upon all this beauty about us, every thought we think is a prayer. Here beneath these green boughs, with the birds singing and the wonderful blue of the sky above us, we realize that God is very near."

Obediently Mis' Melissa seated herself upon the wooden bench beside her teacher and the lesson began.

Opening a well-worn little book, Mrs.

Stanton read to her page after page of wonderful truths, while Mis' Melissa listened eagerly, only interrupting, now and then, to ask a question or to have some point, obscure to her simple mind, explained. Not until the evening shadows began to steal across the hills did the lesson end, and as Mrs. Stanton rose to go she gave the book into Mis' Melissa's hand saying, "Keep it, Miss Melissa, and study it well. You will find it a treasure of wonderful things. Read it often and if you follow its precepts you will need no other teacher. It will be your friend and counsellor and prove a lantern to your feet in times of darkness and stress." Gratefully Mis' Melissa clutched the little book that was to shed its light upon her path and thanked her visitor earnestly.

THE days passed quickly and the session of the summer school was drawing to a close. Often Mrs. Stanton, whom Mis' Melissa had grown to love and admire as one who "lived the life," called at the little house and many an hour was spent in patiently teaching, and making clear to Mis' Melissa's ofttimes troubled mind the lessons in the little book. Frequently Mis' Melissa accompanied her teacher to the Hall to hear again the beautiful voice that had so charmed her on her first visit. The music, too, she enjoyed and although she gathered many a pearl of thought to while away her lonesome days, and many a seed of kindliness was sown in her heart that later was to blossom into some good deed, she still scoffed at many of the things she heard and saw.

" 'Pears t' me I never did hear or see such funny goin's on as is at thet New Thought camp," she remarked confidentially one day, to Mrs. Pettit. "Some of 'em's all right—like Mis' Stanton now.

She's an angel right from Heaven ef ever there wuz one, but thet tall, thin woman with the big eyes is too much fer me. When she gits up ter read yer names and numbers and tells yer whether ye should be named Evangeline Marie, or just plain Susan, and where yer place on the path is, then I want ter know.

"She says we pick out our own names afore we're born—as if any one's goin' ter believe that thet's got a name like Ebenezer or Mary Jane.

"And they certainly do hev the queerest notions. Only last week I heerd the awfullest noise ever wuz down in the lot and thinks I t' myself 'thet old cow is surely a-dyin' at last,' so I ran down quick and as true as I'm a standin' here, Mis' Pettit, there set a woman under the tree a-makin' all them awful noises.

" 'Land sakes, woman,' I sez; 'whatever under the sun ails yer? Air ye sick? I could hear ye a-groanin' a mile away.'

" 'Heavens, no,' sez she, laughin'. 'I wuz only a-practicin' my singin' lesson. I'm

studyin' voice culture and I come down here to be alone with Nature. All these wonderful rocks and trees, with these beautiful vines runnin' over them brings me into perfect harmony with the Universe. When I set here I feel the wonderful cosmic urge all about me and it helps me to express myself.'

" 'Ye don't mean it,' says I. 'I never heerd tell o' such a thing; but I can tell *you* somethin' thet mebbe ye don't know. If ye don't git offen them same pretty vines ye're a-sittin' on, right quick, ye'll hev as fine a case of ivy pizenin' as ever ye'll want ter see and ye won't be a-lookin' fer any other kind of an urge then, believe me!' My, but she got off quick!

"I thought thet Swani woman wuz bad enough but when I see a hull lot of respectable lookin' women dancin' around in a circle fer their health—it certainly gits me.

"Time wuz when city folks came up here a-lookin' fer good plain country vittles and plenty o' home-made bread and fresh milk

and vegetables—but, land sakes, now they come up ter jine a fastin' class and pay out their good money ter go hungry. I don't know whether it's good for their souls or their figgers, but anyhow they do it. Plain livin' and high thinkin' suits some folks, but they're the limit.

"All they git ter keep 'em from starvin' ter death is sour milk and inions and lettuce from the garden—I know because I sell it to 'em. But land sakes, they're perfeckly happy—so I'm a-learnin' like the rest of the New Thoughters ter keep my hands off and let 'em go their own way. It's their stummicks an' their problem, so they must settle the question fer themselves."

SEPTEMBER in all her fulness of fruit and flowers had waxed and waned and now the golden October days were here. Most of the city folks had gone—only a few stragglers remained, beauty lovers, loth to tear themselves away from the glorious colors that decked the countryside.

Maples, resplendent in their red and gold, hickories and beeches in palest yellow; the ivy clamoring over the ancient stone walls and the sumac flaunting its crimson banners 'gainst the sky, made a picture more wonderful than human hands could paint. The stacks of rustling corn and the brown earth of the newly-ploughed fields; the green hills, and over all the purple haze that comes only in the Autumn, lent to the place a peculiar charm.

All this beauty did not pass unnoticed with Mis' Melissa. It was as if her eyes, long blind to the light, had opened at last. She could see! And not only the beauty of the country, which hitherto she had looked upon with unseeing eyes, but the beauty

that lies in the hearts and lives of her fellowmen.

Long ago she had forgiven the trespassers who had invaded her fields to watch the sunset. Indeed, she could even understand now why they came, for a sense of beauty and a love of Nature had awakened in Mis' Melissa, too.

There was only one whom she had not yet learned to forgive—but she was trying hard. This was the neighbor whose farm adjoined hers. Ten years before they had had a spirited dispute over the ownership of a line fence and with each succeeding year the breach had grown. They never spoke or glanced at each other when they met, as they did occasionally in the nearby village or at the Grange meetings. Each held the other with hatred in their hearts and the more kindly disposed neighbors had long ceased to try to act as peacemakers.

Mis' Melissa tried hard to live up to her new religion. Each day as she sat quietly in meditation she sent her old enemy

thoughts of love. She had been taught to do this by Mrs. Stanton and though she tried hard it was not always a success. Old thoughts of anger and resentment would flash up, but only to be quenched by her resolute will.

Her "enemy," Halsey Corwin, had brought a young bride home to the house across the fields nearly two years before, and though Mis' Melissa met the young wife occasionally on the road she had not yet spoken.

Lately, she had not been well, so Mis' Pettit said, and Mis' Melissa kept promising herself that some day, real soon, she would call and try to be a little neighborly. But that day had not yet arrived and Mis' Melissa contented herself with sending them thoughts of love across the invisible ether.

THE baby of her dreams had not yet materialized but with each day Mis' Melissa's faith grew stronger. Somehow—in some way—it would appear, she felt sure.

It must be that she was at fault and so she redoubled her efforts.

Perhaps her faith was not strong enough! "Believe that ye have received." Ah, that was it! She had been striving for results—looking anxiously each day for the baby to appear from she knew not where, when she should be giving thanks that it was already hers. Her winter coat was packed away in the old chest upstairs, and although she was not wearing it and it was not visible to the eye, yet it was none the less hers. So with the baby. It was hers even though it had not yet come forth into visibility! She had not been taking the law at its own terms, but she would remedy that quickly.

Going up into the tiny attic she unearthed the old cradle that years before the baby sister had nestled in, and dragging it

forth from its hiding place among the rafters, she dusted it carefully and installed it in the little bedroom that had not been occupied since the baby sister passed away.

Here each day she sat alone praising and giving thanks for the gift received as she tried to picture a baby's downy head upon the pillow.

She had not learned much about visualization, but she had heard the folks at the Hall talk about it and relate their experiences and although it was hard for her untrained mind to grasp she did her best.

Sometimes in imagination she saw herself sitting in that same high-backed rocking chair with a tiny baby that lay slumbering upon her breast. Often, in thought, she gently tucked it snug and warm into the little cradle. Sometimes she seemed to feel a tiny hand upon her arm—to hear the patter of childish feet upon the wooden floor, and starting suddenly, she would open her eyes and look about—almost in affright—it seemed so real.

Every evening when the work was finished and the table cleared, Mis' Melissa brought out her Bible and the precious book of lessons and diligently applied herself to the study of the truths set forth so simply. Then, laying aside the book she would close her eyes and folding her hands would seek to enter the "Silence."

This going into the Silence of which she had heard so much among the people at the Hall, and of which they talked so glibly, was a very complicated affair to her. Strive as she would, she could not control her thoughts or drive away the wandering ideas that flitted across her mind. No matter how high her spiritual standpoint, or how beautiful the affirmations she held, before long she would find herself wondering if the black hen had stolen a nest somewhere in the loft or whether that rascal Jim had put the cows out in the pasture lot that morning.

Finally, in despair, she gave up her process of trying to fill a vacuum and returned with renewed vigor to her visualizing,

which came easier and was far more potent in her case.

But, unconsciously, this sitting alone each day, this "habit of the Soul," which Mis' Melissa had acquired, had wrought a wondrous change in her life and a quiet peace brooded over the little house beneath the shadow of the mountain.

A happiness that she had never known grew up within her, a strange new consciousness of serenity and quiet. All the rasping, troublesome things of her little world seemed to lose their power to annoy and she found herself singing little snatches of long-forgotten songs as she went about her daily tasks, and the sharp voice that had so often called Jim to account for some slight lapse of duty was heard no more. She ceased to find fault with her neighbors and viewed their shortcomings with tolerance. All the troubled, crabbed lines that told of sharp words and narrow thoughts—lines that made Mis' Melissa seem old, for she was not really old in years—had been erased as if with magic

fingers, and in their place a look of peace and sweet content had come. Mis' Melissa had blossomed like the rose!

She had learned what many do not know —that every soul must take time for quiet and meditation, for in it lies the secret of power. This daily meditation, this practice of the Presence of God, seems to focus Divine Presence within the consciousness and to "Come ye apart and rest awhile" gives new inspiration and knowledge, a steadiness of purpose and the power to meet the trials that arise in every life. She was at peace with the world, and every morning as she rose and dressed she sent out her love to all the World, and in return Love came back to her on the wings of each new day.

Even the little house took on an air of gaiety and looked quite different from its ordinary dull and drabbed self. Neat white curtains hung in the windows and behind the old-fashioned panes scarlet geraniums budded and bloomed.

CHRISTMAS was not far off. The snow lay on the ground white and deep and only a stray hunter or a chance traveler passed that way. The days were long and dreary, but Mis' Melissa never faltered in her belief. At times when the longing seemed more than she could bear, she would get out the little well-thumbed volume and reread its pages, and then, strengthened and encouraged, she would enter the little chamber to gaze upon the cradle that waited, all white and dainty, for the tiny occupant that was to come.

Often she sat in there and sewed and no one who knew Mis' Melissa would have believed that there, safe from prying eyes, a little pile of snowy garments, dainty and small enough for a doll, was steadily growing under Mis' Melissa's loving hand—garments that should some day clothe the tiny body of her dream child.

No longer did the loneliness oppress her. She had found a friend, more loving, more kind, more true, than any earthly one she had ever known. Mis' Melissa had

learned to look within—to withdraw herself from the outside world and there she had found solace.

"Nearer is He than breathing. Closer than hands or feet," she would quote softly to herself, and in the joy of this realization, all fear and loneliness were dispelled.

Each night before retiring she scanned her Bible, by the light of the white-globed lamp and found great comfort in it. It was no new thing for her to do this, for she had always been a God-fearing woman, but now, with this new light within her soul, she understood, where before she could not grasp its meaning. It was all as clear as day to her now, and she read its pages with delight, and within her heart gratitude welled up for the gentle woman who had taught her to know God aright.

ONE evening as she sat thus engaged, she thought she heard the gate open, and a moment later a step upon the path. Old Tige, the dog, arose and growled. Mis' Melissa listened with straining ears—it must be the wind rising —surely no stranger was passing at this late hour. Again there was a step upon the frozen ground and then a knock upon the door. This was repeated, and Mis' Melissa, who knew no fear, opened it wide and there upon the little porch stood Halsey Corwin—her nearest neighbor and enemy—he of the line fence dispute.

For a moment he stood irresolute, as if scarcely knowing just what to say, and then, as if summoning up his courage, he said nervously, "Mis' Melissa, I come ter ask a favor of you. My wife's sick, and I have ter git the doctor somehow. She ain't used ter the country much and she's sufferin' and afraid ter stay alone. Won't you please slip over and stay with her whilst I'm gone?

"I—I'm sorry about that line fence busi-

ness," he went on hurriedly, turning his hat about in his hands as he spoke. "I've been wantin' ter ask yer ter make up fer some time and let by-gones be by-gones.

'Tain't right for folks—neighbors 'specially, to feel so towards each other."

"Never mind talkin' about thet now," Mis' Melissa answered abruptly, not seeming to notice his proffered truce; "I'll be right with ye—jest wait 'til I git my wraps on—it's a right sharp night."

The man waited impatiently, and soon Mis' Melissa reappeared well wrapped in a warm shawl and hood and together they left the house, the man taking the turn to the right in his search for the doctor and she to the white cottage across the fields, in one room of which a light burned brightly. On reaching the house, she knocked and then briskly entered. In a bedroom just off the little sitting-room the young wife lay and when she heard Mis' Melissa's cheery voice, she quickly answered and gratefully clasped the hand held out to her in friendliness and love.

The night wore on and the woman was in agony. Mis' Melissa did what she could to ease her suffering, but there was little to do but wait, and at last, as the dawn was almost breaking, the doctor, with Halsey Corwin beside him, drove up to the gate.

The hours passed and the husband and Mis' Melissa with strained, anxious faces waited, doing what little they could to help, and with the first gleam of the sun rising above the hills they heard the feeble wail of a new born baby.

A little later the doctor, grave-faced and weary, placed the tiny thing in Mis' Melissa's arms, saying gently, "Take care of her Mis' Melissa. The mother has gone—I could not save her," and turning he left the house.

EAGERLY Mis' Melissa clasped the little one to her breast, and all the mother love within her, the love that had been pent up and stifled for so long, welled up within her like some spring long dry but now bubbling up through the softening earth.

Wrapping the little one in her own warm garment and leaving the sorrowing man to the kind-hearted neighbors who came to offer their aid in his distress, Mis' Melissa hurried home and placed the baby in the little cradle—empty no longer!

Gazing upon it as it lay sleeping she could scarce contain the joy that rioted in her soul. At last she had a baby to love and tend and as she gazed a sudden realization came to her. Her dream had come true! The baby was here! It lay in the old wooden cradle, just as she had so often pictured it, rosy and dimpled and fair, and her heart seemed almost to burst with happiness as she gazed at the tiny creature so helpless—and yet wielding so great a power.

The blue eyes of the baby opened and looked up trustingly into hers, and Mis' Melissa, stooping, kissed the little cheek, soft as the petal of a flower.

The baby grew and thrived under her tender care and smiled at her approach. Mis' Melissa was in her element—she had found her true calling at last and no baby ever received more loving care or more tender nursing than the little one who had come in answer to her prayer.

Halsey Corwin, dejected and sad, came each day to see the little one and though Mis' Melissa sought to cheer him by speaking words of comfort, the man seemed utterly broken in spirit by the sudden blow that had fallen upon him.

One day he mentioned in a casual way that he thought of leaving the neighborhood; the old place had become unbearable since his wife's death and though he did not speak of it again, a terrible fear gripped at Mis' Melissa's heart and for awhile drove all the joy and happiness from her life.

Was her dream to end almost as soon as it had begun? Would he take the little one from her now that she knew the joys of mother love and leave her lonely and sad as she had been in the years before? Was this the way God kept His promises? Was it, after all, only a gift from Heaven, loaned for a little while to show her how impossible her dream had been? Ah, surely no—God could not be so cruel, for God was Love.

Each day at the father's approach she trembled lest he had come to take the little one from her, but he said nothing—only watched with growing interest how closely the baby hands had entangled themselves about Mis' Melissa's heart.

SEATING herself one day as usual in a low chair beside the cradle, so that she could watch the baby's every breath, Mis' Melissa opened her Bible and sought to find some word of encouragement, *something* to ease her troubled mind.

Her heart was heavy. She felt that she dared not hope. Halsey Corwin would never give up the baby to her—she, who had fought him so hard and bitterly over the ownership of the disputed land. She would give anything to retain the child and keep it always, but she felt he would never consent. For some time now she had forgiven him his part in the quarrel and would have forgotten and swept it from her mind forever—but could he forgive and forget as well? She did not know.

As she sat there, troubled in spirit, her faith seemed to crumble—it was no use—and turning the pages again, her eyes fell upon the words: "All things are possible to them that believe."

"Lord, *I* believe—help Thou mine un-

belief," she cried in her anguish, and as she knelt beside the sleeping babe there came to her mind the words:

"Whatsoever things ye pray for, believe that ye *have* received, and ye shall have them."

Gratefully Mis' Melissa seized upon them and all her doubt and fear fell away like a mantle dropped upon the floor.

"I thank Thee, Lord, that Thou hast heard my prayer—for I know that Thou hearest me always," she murmured; "I know this little one is mine to keep and I accept Thy gift, knowing that Thou will make all things straight and in Thine own time and way," and rising, renewed and strengthened, Mis' Melissa took up her daily tasks with a light heart and a prayer of thanksgiving upon her lips. Nothing mattered now. She would keep her eye single and see but the one thing—that God had answered her prayer and the baby was hers.

CHRISTMAS day was here. The little sitting-room wore quite a gay and festive air. Branches of red bay berries and the scarlet and orange blossoms of the bitter-sweet mingled with the green of the running pine, hung in clusters and were festooned upon the walls and mantel, and a tiny cedar tree no larger than the babe herself, decked with tinsel and strings of pink and white popcorn, occupied a place of honor.

The table with its snowy cloth and its cluster of woodland fern and scarlet berries in the center, was laid for two, and drawn up close beside it was the cradle in which the baby lay gurgling and happy, her own dinner beside her in a bottle, seemingly quite indifferent to the appetizing odors that floated in from the kitchen.

Halsey Corwin sat and watched the little scene quietly and not until after the finest turkey in Mis' Melissa's barnyard had been carved and eaten, and the mince and apple pies for which Mis Melissa was famed had gone the way of all good pies,

and the white cloth had been replaced by the red one, and she had set out the jug of cider and the dish of rosy-cheeked apples without which the dinner would have been incomplete, did Halsey Corwin speak.

Turning to Mis' Melissa, he said, falteringly:

"Mis' Melissa—I'm a-goin' ter leave soon. 'Tain't no use fer me ter stay 'round here now the wife's gone, so I'm a-goin' West ter try and fergit all this. I hain't got no relatives—leastways any that I'm acquainted with. 'Tain't a man's place ter try and bring up a little thing like that, and I see how you love the baby and don't want ter part with her, so I went ter town yestiddy and made out a deed fer the farm t' you—to be held fer the little one when she's older.

"I know you'll be good ter her," he went on. "I don't have ter ask yer that, so I give her ter you. By next week I guess I'll be off."

Mis' Melissa listened in amazement! He could do this wonderful thing—trust

her so, when she had been so hard—even unjust to him in the old days, and now he was giving the baby to her—to bring up to be her very own!

"Surely 'God moves in ways mysterious His wonders to perform,'" she murmured softly. "Lord, I thank Thee."

Grasping the hand held out to her so awkwardly in a warm grip of friendship and gratitude, Mis' Melissa said in a firm voice, although the tears were not far off.

"I thank yer, Halsey Corwin, fer the trust ye place in me. I think ye wise in goin' far away ter new scenes and new faces. 'Tain't right fer anyone to stick in a rut, leastways when they've had trouble. After a while you'll git over this first deep sorrer and life'll be wuth more ter ye then it is now.

"I'll hold the property fer the little one and look after it. All thet I have is a-goin' ter her anyhow, some day. I fixed that all up, so there won't be no more trouble over thet line fence. Every blessed one in the place kin come down fer all I

care. Your farm and mine is one now and they both belong ter the baby."

Silently they clasped hands again.

"Remember, thet when you've outgrown this sadness and heartache an' yer thoughts turn back ter her, there's always a welcome a-waitin' yer here." And *you'll* want ter come back some day, I know, ter the old place where ye wuz raised, and where yer friends 'll be waitin' ter greet yer," and as she said it something very like a blush showed beneath the clear tan of Mis' Melissa's cheek.

A week later, but not before the baby had been taken to the church and christened Sophie Elizabeth after its mother, and the little sister whose memory Mis' Melissa held so dear, Halsey Corwin turned his steps toward the West and peace and happiness settled upon the little house and the neighbors ceased to talk.

A YEAR and some months had passed and the long winter was drawing to a close. The snow gave way to trickling rain. The birds came flocking back and chirping flew from tree to tree. The brooks loosened from the icy hand of Winter, went singing on with a turbulent roar to join the river. The fields were sodden and the country roads a sea of mud through which one floundered to reach his destination.

To Halsey Corwin, picking his way along and striving to avoid the spots where the mud lay deepest, the atmosphere was charged with wonderful things and seemed to fill him with its buoyancy. He responded to the keen sense of new life that was springing up all about him and it thrilled him as he walked. The willows had turned to palest yellow green, the sky was blue. Everywhere the buds were swelling. Spring was in the air!

He did not mind the mud, for each step brought him nearer to that which he had traveled many miles to see—his baby

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girl, and the old home, and, yes—Mis' Melissa! Long ago he had forgiven her for her part in the controversy of the line fence and had taken the blame upon himself. As he had come to know Mis' Melissa in her new guise, the sweet womanliness of her character and the sterling qualities that showed in spite of the rather rough exterior, had won him and he had grown to respect and care for her.

Again he walked through the little gate and knocked upon the door as he had done that winter evening once before, and again, Mis' Melissa opened it and welcomed him cordially. The patter of baby feet and the childish prattle of a baby voice reached his ears and a moment later little Sophie Elizabeth, *his* baby, too, was tightly clasped in his arms.

* * * *

Spring was here now in all its beauty. The world rejoiced and Mis' Melissa with it, for one sunshiny morning when the daffodils and the iris were in blossom there was a quiet wedding in the little church in

Boscobel and as the happy couple, with Baby Sophie clasped tightly in Mis' Melissa's arms drove down the road, Mis' Pettit from her window watched them with envious eyes.

"Well, well," she said aloud. "Wonders 'll never cease. Ter think such a thing could happen—it's past belief. I'm a-goin' to jine that New Thought Church myself."